NATIONAL
NGLTF
GAY & LESBIAN
TASK FORCE
Policy Institute

LESBIAN AND GAY FAMILIES ISSUES FACT SHEET

FAMILIES BACKGROUND:

Throughout this election year and in the recent past, the term "traditional family values" has been bandied about without a specific definition of who this term means and who it expressly excludes. President Bush stated that he "can't accept as normal lifestyle people of the same sex being parents...I don't accept that as normal" and added that he believes in "traditional family values." From a gay and lesbian perspective, there are at least three problems with this phrase: first, the traditional family is a statistical myth and does not reflect the reality of families in this country; second, the term fails to incorporate the existence of loving and strong families created by gay and lesbian parents and couples; and third the term is wrongly presented as a flat contradiction to gay and lesbian civil rights.

▼ Today, only one in four U.S. families is a "nuclear" family, with two married parents and one or more children. (U.S. Census Bureau Household Information Survey, 1990)

▼ Only nine percent of U.S. families consist of one homemaker parent and one parent who works outside the home, with children. (U.S. Census Bureau Household Information Survey, 1990)

▼ More than 90 percent of American families therefore live in single-parent or extended families, intergenerational families, blended, adopted or foster families, same-sex or dual-income families, and many other hybrids of loving and social connections.

▼A 1989 poll showed that of 1000 Americans surveyed, 54 percent believed that gay and lesbian couples should be permitted to receive medical and life insurance benefits from a partner's coverage. Sixty-five percent believe that gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to inherit each other's property. (Time-CNN poll, 1989)

▼ In a survey of 1200 people conducted in 1989, 74 percent of the respondents defined family as "a group who love and care for each other." The survey offered three definition choices, including other, more legalistic definitions. (Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company "American Family Values Study," 1989)

▼ There are currently four to five million lesbian and gay parents in this country who face legal obstacles to creating and nurturing their families. (National Center for Lesbian Rights)

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In most workplace situations, employee benefits packages or "fringe" benefits comprise as much as 40 percent of a worker's total compensation. Marital status most often determines an employee's eligibility for entitlements such as sick, bereavement or parenting leave, health and dental insurance, disability and retirement benefits, family assistance and discount buying privileges.

▼Twenty-five jurisdictions currently recognize some form of domestic partnership, offering either partner registries, health insurance coverage, hospital visitation rights, sick leave..

▼At least 20 private-sector companies and organizations recognize domestic partners in employee or member health benefit plans.

▼Many unions have negotiated contracts for their members that include domestic partner or alternative family benefits, primarily in the form of bereavement, sick and parenting leave.
(Source: "Domestic Partner Recognitions," NGLTF Policy Institute, June 1992)

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTING:

Many lesbians and gay men are extremely qualified to be adoptive or foster parents and would provide very suitable, nurturing home lives. However, most states prohibit or discourage adoption by gay people.

▼Two states, Florida and New Hampshire, have laws expressly prohibiting lesbians and gay men from adopting children.

▼New Hampshire also bars lesbians and gay men from becoming foster parents.

▼While a few states and the District of Columbia have allowed joint adoption by lesbian or gay couples, most adoptions by couples are listed on the record as single parent adoptions.

CHILD CUSTODY AND VISITATION:

The conflict over child custody and visitation brings more lesbians and gay men into courtrooms in this nation than any other issue. Decisions on custody and visitation are made on a state-by-state, judge-by-judge basis.

▼Eleven states have laws that say sexual orientation is irrelevant in custody disputes

▼ Courts in eleven other states have based rulings on the presumption that lesbians and gay men are unfit for custody of their children solely on the basis of sexual orientation.

▼Trial courts in Nevada, Virginia and Kentucky have ruled that homosexuality in and of itself renders a parent unfit to have custody of his or her child.

▼In appellate courts of other states (California, Indiana, Massachusetts and Arkansas) homosexuality is not grounds for depriving parents custody of their children.

▼Studies show that there is no correlation between a parent's sexual orientation and that of the child. The incidence of same-sex orientation among children of homosexuals occurs as frequently and in the same proportion as in the general population.
(Source: "Domestic Partner Recognitions," NGLTF Policy Institute, June 1992; "Preserving and Protecting the Families of Lesbians and Gay Men," National Center for Lesbian Rights, 1986)

The Lesbian and Gay Families Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute works to secure legal recognition and protection for gay families, including domestic partnership, foster parenting and other rights. For further information, contact Families Project Director Ivy Young, (202) 332-6483.